

Practice safety when hunting

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Here is a true story about a firearms accident that happened in Red River, New Mexico more than 20 years ago. Two kids were shooting cans with a .22 caliber rifle. The rifle had hollow point bullets and it accidentally discharged into the right shoulder of one of the boys. His friend managed to get help from a nearby adult who drove into town for help. The adult then drove a pickup with the kids into town, at a high rate of speed. He honked his horn and flashed his headlights to get other motorists off the road as he proceeded into town. He finally got to the local clinic 30 minutes later, but the child did not survive his wound. This is a true story. The adult who drove into town was the Area Director of the OSHA office where I once worked.

There are some very important lessons to be learned from this tragic accident:

- A common .22 caliber bullet is as deadly as any center fire caliber.
- Twenty-two caliber rifles are not toys and should never be used by children without adult supervision.

You might remember the newspaper comic figure “Dick Tracy” always being shot in the shoulder and surviving. But in reality, any gunshot to the torso can be serious if medical attention is not immediately provided.

Hunting with firearms, either with handguns, muzzleloaders or center fire long guns contain a certain amount of risk. This risk can be reduced with proper training and preparation. In FY 2000, there were 926 hunting related accidents in the North American continent. Of these cases, 91 were fatal accidents. This figure might not seem high, but there are millions of hunters. They travel alone, either by vehicle or by foot to access the hunting areas and this is far more dangerous than hunting in itself.

Keep these tips in mind as you head off to the woods this season:

- When you get your hunting license, you will

need to take a hunter safety course.

- This should go without saying, but NEVER consume alcohol while driving to, hiking to, camping during (and by all means) when attempting to hunt. Drinking and firearms do not mix.
- Keep all firearms unloaded with clear or open actions until you actually begin hunting.
- All firearms are loaded until proven otherwise. Never take someone else’s word that a gun is unloaded. Check it yourself!
- Only point your firearm at what you are intending to shoot. At all other times aim the muzzle in a safe direction.
- Common sense tells us that before crossing a stream, or while going over rough terrain, unload your gun first. If with a partner, hand the firearm to him or her when crossing any fence. This is the law in most states.
- Wear “10-mile orange” or fluorescent coats or vests while hunting. It can be too easy to be mistaken for another hunter’s game. Again, this is law in most states.

